DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 908 EA 026 814

AUTHOR Oswald, Lori Jo
TITLE Priority on Learning: How School Districts Are Concentrating Their Scarce Resources on Academics.
INSTITUTION Oregon School Study Council, Eugene.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, OR.
ISSN ISSN-0095-6694
PUB DATE 1995-00-00
NOTE 72p.; Theme issue. Published quarterly. Contains "Bulletin in Brief."
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, Oregon School Study Council, 1215 University of Oregon, 217 Education Building, 1571 Alder St., College of Education, Eugene, OR 97403 ($9, nonmember; $6.50, member; $3 postage and handling on billed orders; quantity discounts available). Tel: 541-346-1397
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- ERIC Publications (071) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
JOURNAL CIT OSSC Bulletin; v38 n8-9 Apr-May 1995
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Cooperation; *Educational Finance; *Educational Innovation; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Human Resources; Instructional Innovation; *Learning Strategies; *Resource Allocation; Retrenchment; School District Spending; Teaching Methods; Time Factors (Learning)

ABSTRACT

This bulletin provides an overview of the ways in which school districts and schools are making learning a priority in schools despite scarce resources. it describes how districts and schools make use of resources, instructional strategies, and policies to overcome the barriers caused by tight budgets. Examples from Oregon schools are provided. Data were collected from telephone interviews with 11 individuals--principals, superintendents, and directors of educational research centers. Chapter 1 focuses on the effective allocation of resources. Examples show how school districts are streamlining their administrative operations to free up resources for instruction. The chapter also examines the relationship between school inputs and student outcomes and surveys the use of technology in the classroom. Chapter 2 describes the relationship between time and student achievement. Methods of using community and business volunteers, parents, and peers to assist students are discussed in the third chapter. The fourth chapter is concerned with instructional strategies that promote learning, including ways of meeting students' needs, targeting student populations, and improving teaching methods. The final chapter discusses policies favoring student learning at the state, district, and school levels. A condensed version of the bulletin is included. (Contains 84 references.) (LMI)

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ED 461 908

# PRIORITY ON LEARNING

## How School Districts Are Concentrating Their Scarce Resources on Academics

Lori Jo Oswald

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Oregon School Study Council
April and May 1995 • Volume 38, Numbers 8 and 9

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ISSN 0095-6694
Nonmember price: $9.00
Member price: $6.50
Quantity Discounts:
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# Preface

*"Why are American students so weak academically compared to students in Japan and other countries?"*

"Why aren't schools doing more to help children from poor families?"

"Why should I pay higher taxes to support schools? They cost too much already, and anyway, I got a better education thirty years ago than kids do today!"

*"What is wrong with schools today?"*

Sometimes it may seem to school administrators that there are as many complaints about the way schools are run as there are students. Administrators are struggling with tight budgets, exhausted teachers, a much more diverse and demanding student population than ever before, conflicting policies from the federal, state, district, and school levels, skeptical parents and community members, and a myriad of theories and suggested instructional strategies from educational researchers. There are so many bandwagons that it must be overwhelming just determining which ones to ride on. What's an educator to do other than throw in the chalk and find another occupation?

Fortunately, as this Bulletin reveals, despite the conflicting views and fading funds, there is plenty of good news in education today. At no time have there been so many involved in finding solutions to the challenges in education as there are today. Among educators, there is a general mood of collaboration, sharing, enthusiasm, and caring.

This Bulletin, written by Lori Jo Oswald, provides an overview of how school districts and schools are making learning a priority in schools, in spite of scarce resources.

Lori Jo Oswald is a freelance technical writer and editor who lives in Anchorage, Alaska. She received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Oregon in 1994. She has taught at Umpqua Community College, Lane Community College, and the University of Oregon, all in Oregon, and currently teaches at the University of Alaska in Anchorage.

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# Introduction

The Committee for Economic Development (CED) recently noted, "Changes in school organization that emphasize academic performance and the more effective use of resources are the ingredients most needed to improve student achievement" (1994).

This Bulletin is concerned with how school districts and schools are making use of resources, instructional strategies, and policies to overcome the barriers caused by tight budgets. Schools are using innovative methods and redistribution of resources to foster student academic achievement. The term *resources* refers to budgeting practices, time, class size, technology, and people, especially tutors and community volunteers (parents, organizations, and businesses).

Realizing that their revenues from taxation are limited, school and district officials are finding resources other than money to help them meet their goals. They are flexible in drawing on these resources, considering the communities' and parents' attitudes, teachers' abilities and time, and students' needs. This Bulletin provides an overview of innovations in resource allocation and gives examples from Oregon schools.

The primary focus of chapter 1 is effective allocation of resources. Examples show how school districts are streamlining their administrative operations to free up resources for instruction. In addition, this chapter examines the relationship between school inputs and student outcomes, and then it surveys the use of technology in the classroom.

Chapter 2 focuses on the relationship between time and student achievement. Chapter 3 covers methods of using community and business volunteers, parents, and peers to assist students. Chapter 4 is concerned with instructional strategies that promote learning, including ways of meeting students' needs, targeting certain student populations, and improving teaching methods. Finally, chapter 5 discusses policies favoring student learning at the state, district, and school levels.

*Chapter 1*

# Resource Allocation

District and school officials are using several techniques to shift resources so that student learning has top priority. Some of the common methods discussed in this chapter are redistributing resources, streamlining administration and support services, eliminating teaching and classified positions, eliminating extracurricular activities, sharing personnel, shifting certain expenses to the community and parents, and reducing building and maintenance costs.

## Shifting Financial Support for Education

Federal government support of elementary and secondary education declined from $4.00 to $2.79 per $1,000 of personal income between 1980 and 1990; state government support remained about the same; and local government support increased from $18.05 to $19.75 (Kern Alexander in Kern Alexander and Vivian Williams 1991). "Local school districts that had little fiscal capacity could not raise the necessary resources and [the] educational opportunity of children in poor school districts was eroded or denied," says Alexander. "The result is that the standard of education continues to decline in poor school districts relative to more affluent school districts."

Although some, like Allen Odden (May 1994), say that education funding has actually risen "quite consistently since World War II," there are reasons to believe that budgets will get tighter, including the tendency of states to fund prisons and Medicaid before schools, proposals in state legislatures to limit spending, and the revolt against rising local taxes (as in Oregon). In addition, says Odden, any significant new federal spending will likely occur in health rather than education.

Letha Albright (1992) describes schools in Missouri being forced to cut teaching, administrative, and support positions; lengthen the school day; cut programs; and increase class size. Even in Alaska, where schools receive

the highest per-pupil funding, cuts are having to be made. Anchorage School Board President Peggy Robinson-Wilson (1995) says that millions of dollars of cuts are slated for the 1995-96 school year; yet at the same time expectations for schools have risen:

> We're being told to raise test scores, reduce class size, decrease violence, provide more buses, keep our schools cleaned and repaired, reduce dropout rates, provide special therapies for students throughout the state, build and staff new schools to house more children, meet the learning needs of all children and their parents, provide activities for students after school, have up-to-date technology in every school, etc. Oh, and not ask for enough additional money to compensate for inflation and these extra costs.

In Oregon, the passage of Measure 5, a property tax-relief initiative, has led to a sharp decrease in state funds since it went into effect in 1991. Yvonne Katz, superintendent of the Beaverton School District, explained the effect on her district: "We used to be able to receive up to $15 dollars per $1,000 evaluation of taxes, and we don't anymore. In 1994-95 we received $7.50, and in 1995-96 we'll receive $5.00. Also, before Measure 5, each district had the right to hold an election to pass operating levies, but now districts no longer have that option."

"We are probably running as lean a school district of this size as you've seen," said Scott Mutchie, superintendent of the Bend-LaPine School District:

> Our school district is caught in a three-way bind. We're experiencing a rapid growth in numbers of students—3 to 4 percent a year. At the same time, we're totally involved in the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, which is Oregon's answer to the school-reform movement. We're also in a decline in funding from the state level. So what do you do? You have to provide space and adequate learning.

Districts are handling their financial challenges by focusing on two areas: reallocating funds and streamlining administrative and support services. Both areas are discussed following a brief review of data on the connection between spending and student achievement.

## The Relationship Between Expenditures and Student Performance

Do schools really need additional financial support, or is existing money not being used in the most efficient and effective manner? According to the Committee for Economic Development (CED), "money alone will not remedy the serious educational deficiencies in most of our schools. In fact, overall real educational expenditures have grown about 80 percent in the last

two decades with no significant improvement in school performance."

Real spending per student has nearly tripled since 1960, and in the last ten years "real expenditure per student increased by one third," states W. Steven Barnett (1994). School spending is now $250 billion per year, some 5 percent of the GNP, he adds. As Julie Lays (1991) notes, "If money were the only measure of an education system, our schools would be getting straight As."

Also, there is little correlation between state educational spending and student performance on standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT (John W. Merline 1991). Increased spending alone will not necessarily bring about improved student outcomes. Eric A. Hanushek and colleagues (1994) insist "the claim that lack of resources is the major factor limiting performance appears to be vastly overused and frequently demonstrably untrue."

Equating spending with school quality or performance when there is "little relationship between performance and resources employed at schools" is a major flaw in the school finance debate, argues Hanushek:

> Disparities in school funding, the subject of traditional school finance reform, are simply not a good measure of differences in school quality. There are good schools that spend a lot and good schools that spend relatively little. There are bad schools that spend relatively little and bad schools that spend a lot. Looking at spending does not give much indication of the quality of any given school. And, there is little reason to expect the pattern of spending and its effectiveness to improve dramatically in the future. (December 1994)

Between 1970 and 1990, real expenditures per pupil in schools actually increased by almost 3.5 percent annually, says Hanushek, for three reasons: (1) noninstructional expenditures (including administration at the school building and retirement and health benefits) increased dramatically, (2) pupil-teacher ratios dropped a quarter, and (3) real teacher salaries increased by 15 percent. The problem is that "none of these things are systematically related to student performance." Even more serious is Hanushek's assertion that when schools have additional funds, they do not generally put those funds toward "things that enhance student outcomes."

Because school budgets are limited and becoming more so, the wise use of school finances is imperative. "There are some places that use money ineffectively and some that use it effectively," says Richard J. Murnane of the Harvard Graduate School of Education (in Debra Viadero 1994). "If you throw money at schools, you get at about the rough average."

But just how should schools go about determining the most effective means of using the money they have? Determining the connection between school inputs and student outcomes is a challenging task that is easier to theorize about than to put into practice. Early studies found inconsistent effects, according to Deborah M. Kazal-Thresher (1993):

## District Spending Patterns

Glen E. Robinson and Nancy Protheroe, summarizing Educational Research Service data of 1991-92 school district budgeting, found that, on the average, districts have the following spending patterns:

- over two-thirds of the budget, 68.0 percent, for instructional services: 49.8 percent for classroom instruction, 8.8 percent for special-education services, 2.7 percent for books and materials, 4.2 percent for auxiliary instructional services such as counselors and librarians, 1.4 percent for curriculum development and staff inservice, and the rest for contracted instructional services such as tuition to other districts
- 5.5 percent of the budget goes to school site leadership (the offices of the principals and assistant principals)
- 7.4 percent to student services
- 4.8 percent to central office administrative and school board functions
- 8.1 percent for maintenance and operations
- 2.8 percent for utilities
- 3.5 percent to other expenditures such as fire insurance premiums and short-term interest

> Some studies showed a significant relationship between inputs, such as teacher quality, class size or per pupil expenditures, and student outcomes, while others did not.... Regardless of the reasons, the confusion about the relationship between school inputs and school quality has created a lack of faith by the public in the ability to improve educational outcomes by increasing educational expenditures.

However, she continues, recent studies, using better data and more sophisticated analyses, have shown a correlation. For example, differences in the quality of schooling accounted for between one-quarter and one-third of the variation in students' standardized reading scores among school districts in Texas. Kazal-Thresher advises schools to hire teachers with stronger literacy skills, avoid exceeding the student-teacher ratio of 18 to 1, and retain experienced teachers in order to "produce higher test scores in exchange for more money."

Good teachers and performance incentives that reward schools and teachers to improve student performance are two variables that lead to increased student achievement, Hanushek believes. At the same time, issues such as job security, reduced workload, and social norms "create incentives for school personnel that may conflict with goals of improved student performance."

Marshal Smith, former dean of Stanford University's School of Education, says it's not the money but what is done with it that is critical: "How it reaches the classroom, how it's used in the classroom, what kinds of expectations are given to the kids" (in Jill Zuckman 1993). Money matters, the CED report concludes, "but only if schools are organized to use it effectively to promote achievement."

## Reallocation of District Funds

To aid student success, existing funds need to be put where they are needed most—in the classroom. The Committee for Economic Development says that school boards and superintendents must ensure this happens by doing the following:

- Monitoring district spending
- Encouraging schools to reallocate current expenditures so that monies are spent more effectively
- Giving schools greater control of resources
- Connecting increased resources with incentives, so that schools are rewarded for making progress toward agreed-upon achievement goals
- Taking into account how costs differ from school to school, particularly where there are students with special needs and different backgrounds

To some extent, the monies available to schools can be increased merely by shifting district funds. After reviewing school district spending, the Office of the State Auditor in Texas concluded that Texas districts could save $185 million annually by cutting costs outside the classroom: "In some cases, staff sizes are excessive, and fringe benefits are generous. Certain districts have serious weaknesses in purchasing of goods and services. In addition, some employee and board member travel expenses are extravagant."

An additional $45 million can be saved annually in Texas, says the state auditor's report. One recommendation is to develop a statewide property self-insurance pool so that districts are not overpaying for property insurance. The state can control textbook costs by providing an annual allotment to each district for textbook purchases, since currently there is no incentive to consider cost of instructional materials. Further, the state can reduce tax-collection costs by eliminating tax-collection offices and contracting with county governments to collect taxes. Additional savings could be accomplished by reducing expenditures in the following areas (examples from specific districts are in parentheses):

- supplies (such as buying the least expensive hole punchers and staplers instead of the most expensive)
- purchasing and general expenditures (such as soliciting bids on motor fuels and requesting reimbursement for taxes paid on motor fuels)
- administration (such as reducing administrative salaries in high-paying districts or reducing excess auxiliary positions)

- fees and dues (such as not paying dues for school employees and board members)
- travel (such as eliminating reimbursement for trips taken—inappropriately—using federal funds and for meals in nearby cities)
- utilities (such as closing down the school building at 5:00 p.m. instead of 10:30 p.m. when it is not being used)
- extracurricular activities (such as soliciting bids from print shops to lower the $4,000 paid producing a yearbook)
- personnel (such as eliminating a secretary-to-the-board position in one district; in other districts of comparable size, the superintendent's secretary handles this job)
- plant maintenance and operations (such as cutting overtime costs)

The above are examples of cuts that local administrators can easily make, the report notes, and none of them will negatively affect the education of children.

## Streamlining Administration and Support Services

Many districts are streamlining administration and support services to free up resources for instruction. What is being done seems to be common sense in many cases. With the implementation of site-based councils at many schools handling budgeting, personnel selection, and curriculum, for example, the need for some administrators at the district level has been eliminated. Unsupported, expensive policy mandates are being eliminated whenever politically possible. New functions and personnel are not being added without eliminating those that are "duplicative or no longer necessary" (CED).

### Wenatchee, Washington

Gene Sharratt, superintendent of the North Central Educational Service District in Wenatchee, Washington, said that districts in Washington are sharing personnel as a way of saving costs. For example, districts are sharing a curriculum or a staff-development person. "A consortia of five districts hired someone to establish and run the computer network in districts and schools. No one can afford it individually but everyone needs it. Sharing really works well for us."

Some of the smaller districts in Sharratt's area are sharing business manager and fiscal positions, and a lot of administrative positions have been eliminated in the last five years. "There are approximately 25 percent fewer

administrative personnel in Washington than twenty years ago, while certificated and noncertificated personnel have increased," Sharratt said, mainly due to a large increase in special-education students that require additional professional-support staff.

**Bend-LaPine, Oregon**

According to Scott Mutchie, superintendent of the Bend-LaPine School District, his district is researching such areas as full inclusion of special-needs students, integrated curriculum, schools within a school, grouping, and blended classes. Still, he said, none of these areas specifically addresses "how to do these things with shrinking dollars." Therefore, Mutchie is using new management styles, including school-based management (SBM), work teams, and personnel cuts to streamline administration:

> We have a new paradigm, wherein we've consolidated the central office. We eliminated a central office curriculum position. That makes us lean; we're certainly going through a transition. Under the old paradigm, you kept cutting back and then people weren't doing things because they thought someone else handled things. The new management style holds people accountable for doing things themselves.

Mutchie's new management style incorporates SBM at the school sites, and the managers now consist of one superintendent, one assistant superintendent, four traditional horizontal teams, and three new vertical teams. One horizontal team consists of all high school principals in Mutchie's district; another is middle school principals; the third is elementary school principals; and the fourth is central-office supervisors. Each team determines what goes on "horizontally" at their school level.

Each vertical team consists of representatives from high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools in one of three regions within the district, as well as supervisory members. Vertical teams "make sure communication goes on between K-12 and we're on track as far as standards across the grades," said Mutchie. The vertical teams attend to areas of concern, textbook materials and adoptions, meeting state requirements, and forming timelines. Decision-making is cyclical, according to Mutchie. Communication goes back and forth between the horizontal and vertical teams.

Mutchie's district is also reassigning personnel and writing grant proposals to compensate for lost monies. A full-time grant-writing position was actually added, despite the budget cuts, which illustrates how important grants are becoming to Oregon schools struggling with the aftermath of Measure 5.

**Newport, Oregon**

Arlen Tieken, director of education of the Lincoln County School District in Newport, Oregon, said,"I imagine every school that's gone through cuts has had to streamline administration and support services as well as teaching staff." Tieken's district cut curriculum specialists, even though the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century requires the district to realign and rework many of its curriculum goals, objectives, standards, and expectations of students. "At one time, the schools had people who could spend a good portion of their day developing curriculum changes, but now we're asking teachers to do that in addition to teaching a larger load."

Other cuts at Lincoln County included program developers, audiovisual and computer-technology support personnel, and elementary school counselors. "The classroom teacher and the building administrators pick up as much as possible," Tieken said, "but many things fall into an area of neglect. We postponed buying textbooks for new adoptions, purchasing new technology, and students don't have as many direct experiences they did before because transportation for all trips has been cut."

**Beaverton, Oregon**

Superintendent Yvonne Katz of the Beaverton School District has had to cut $63 million from programs and services in the last three budgets; at the same time, the district is seeing a 2 percent annual increase in students. Katz said the district has eliminated drivers' education, sharply cut back the talented and gifted program, closed the staff development office, and changed to a stockless warehouse.

In addition, the following staff reductions have been made: school nurses reduced by 50 percent, teaching staff by 14 percent, administrative staff by 19 percent, classified staff by 14 percent, custodial staff by 40 percent, and maintenance staff by 30 percent. To save on building costs, the district now closes all elementary schools by 6 p.m. six days a week. Community organizations can use the facilities, but only if they pay the total cost.

Like many districts, Beaverton has pursued innovative ways of bringing in money, Katz explained:

> We've had to reprioritize the programs and services in our core program, rely on a great amount of fundraising by parents, charge usage fees for every activity and every sport, increase the gate fees for athletic events, pursue business partnerships and cooperative arrangements with other districts to share resources, apply for more grants, and ask our parents to volunteer more in our school buildings.

Bend-LaPine's superintendent, Scott Mutchie, ponders the effects of Measure 5 and the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century: "How long

can we sustain this kind of effort before people get tired? We are eventually going to lose our people and programs if we don't get the funding from the state level. There are so many implications that come with some of those requirements."

**Reductions at the School Level**

Oregon schools are having to make major cuts and seek alternative resources due to Measure 5's impact. At John F. Kennedy Middle School in Eugene, Oregon, Principal Doug Smith eliminated nine teaching positions in the last five years, added an "enormous" parent volunteer program, created interdisciplinary teams to give teachers more support, applied for grants to cover short-term staffing and opportunities for students, increased class size by 30 percent, cut programs such as art and choir, and turned orchestra into a fee-based program.

Even South Salem High School, which did not experience drastic funding cuts due to Measure 5, still has had to make major changes in handling funds. Principal George Dyer said his school is less affected than some schools by Measure 5 "because we've been a poor district for a long time." Still, Dyer has increased student-teacher ratios; cut supplies such as paper and printing; charged students for transportation, activities, and tests such as the SAT; tracked fines and fees more closely so that students pay for lost books and damage to the building or materials; and charged organizations for building use. Dyer stated:

> Next year we may have to cut programs. So far we haven't had to, because we have had fewer alternative programs for students with special needs or behavioral problems over the years. The reason we have fewer of these programs is that we're trying to keep the regular classroom sacred in terms of resources.

Often schools find ways to shift funds from one program to another, such as at Central Elementary School in San Diego, California, which created a preschool program that was needed and requested by the parents, even though it did not meet state guidelines or receive state funding. Parent volunteers help run the program (Calvin R. Stone 1993).

A recent *Time* magazine article highlights the methods used by Vaughn Next Century Learning Center, an elementary school near Los Angeles. Recently changed to a charter school with the freedom to choose how money is spent at the school site, Vaughn is a model of "how to take the money and run—in the direction of greater efficiency and higher student achievement" (Claudia Wallis 1994). Principal Yvonne Chan put payroll and food services up for competitive bids, reorganized special education, and then, with a $1.2 million surplus at the end of the first year, had the money to buy computers, hire more teachers to decrease class size, add a soccer pro-

## What Are the Features of Effective School Finance Systems?

An effective educational finance system should have the following features, according to Odden:

- a focus on the school as the key organizational unit
- devolution of power over the budget to schools
- decentralization of the personnel function to site
- development of a comprehensive school-level information system
- investment of dollars in capacity development
- redesign of teacher compensation
- a policy focus on schools instead of districts

(*Source*: Allen Odden, May 1994)

gram, and begin work on a new classroom complex.

Academically, student performance at Vaughn has improved dramatically in the past four years. Chan attributes this increase to the control over staff she has at the school site, the longer hours the teachers contribute (while receiving higher pay), the eight parent-teacher committees that run the school (with all teachers required to participate), and an insistence on both teacher and parent involvement in students' education.

## Technology in the Classroom

Hanushek and colleagues find fault with many schools for not purchasing or properly using computers and other technology in the classroom: "Technology has not made more inroads into schools because it upsets the structure of personnel use and spending." The authors admit that computers, multimedia devices, expanded databases, and networks do not necessarily lead to improved student performance, but by reducing the demand for school personnel, they save on resources. Without including such technology in classroom learning, warn Hanushek and others, "education remains an extremely labor-intensive industry, impervious to productivity improvements."

Scott Mutchie, superintendent of the Bend-LaPine School District, offered one perspective on why schools have been lagging behind technologically:

> If Rip Van Winkle were to wake up today, one thing he'd recognize after 200 years is the high schools' structure. They have to change and adapt to and incorporate the information explosion and technology. But schools are so institutionalized that they are slow to change. Another problem is that schools don't have the wherewithal to change when they don't have money and time to do it correctly.

Despite such grim commentary, many schools have incorporated technology into the classroom successfully and have found that students benefit academically from the experience. At Calapooia Middle School in Albany, Oregon, all seventh graders are required to take a semester of instruction in computer skills, said Principal Kathleen Hering.

When some 500 teachers who used computers in the classroom were studied by the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL) (1993), the majority expected more from their students and improved classroom time use. They spent more time with individual students, less time lecturing to the class, and less time reviewing material with the entire class.

Principal George Dyer of Oregon's South Salem High School believes that educators need to look at the ability of technology to provide some of the information that teachers have traditionally provided. He also favors tax incentives for parents who purchase technological equipment such as computers, modems, and video players. The future of education will be affected by technology that allows students to hook up to schools and other information sources from the home, Dyer predicts. "This may involve changing policies that require certification and how students can obtain credits. Technology is freeing as far as how many hours are required in the school building." He admits it will take time for these changes to occur.

*Chapter 2*

# Time and Student Achievement

One of the "hot topics" in educational reform right now is *time*—how is it wasted, how teachers can find more of it, how students can learn all that they are required to in the traditional school day and year, and how educators should contend with the fact that students learn at different rates. If money wasn't an issue, there's little question that time wouldn't be either, though schools would still have to deal with curriculum standards and minimum time requirements for certain subjects. But finding more time typically costs money, and schools just don't have enough money to make the time-related changes that could increase student achievement.

This chapter surveys some of the key issues surrounding the issue of time and what to do about it.

Time is a "*big* resource in the sense that relatively small changes in its use can produce large changes in the system's aggregate costs," says Richard Elmore (in National Education Commission on Time and Learning *Highlights*). Researchers have found that "student achievement is directly and positively related to the amount of time students spend paying attention and trying to learn" (Gary B. Stuck and Kinnard P. White). Through studying talented and gifted students, Herbert J. Walberg found that "the investment of time is the key factor in attaining eminence" (in Robert J. Kirschenbaum 1993).

It is true, say Stuck and White, that teachers do not have enough time to accomplish all that they are expected to in the classroom; however, "in many instances teachers do not make efficient use of the time that is available." Improving time management in schools at both the administrative and instructional levels will cost nothing, yet can positively affect student achievement.

As Stuck and White conclude, "Increasing teaching time and the time

students are on task will likely have greater effects on student achievement than will increasing expenditures." James R. Weber (1989) says that "time-on-task is highly related to achievement. The more time students spend on learning, the better the outcomes."

## Reducing Time Wasters

"The typical school year of 1,080 hours may result in as few as 364 hours of time-on-task," according to Jared E. Hazelton and colleagues (1992). The following factors have been found to reduce students' learning time:

- student tardiness and absence
- early closings and late openings
- bad weather
- teacher strikes
- lack of school orderliness
- student discipline/disruptions
- interruptions (PA system, visitors)
- fields trips and assemblies
- lack of clear rules and routines
- lack of adequate direction from teachers about assignments
- extracurricular programs and pullout programs
- testing
- instruction inappropriate to the student's learning level
- the teacher's style of questioning during lessons
- teacher decisions not to start a new topic at the end of a class period or school week
- a general lack of teacher knowledge of effective instructional and classroom management (NECTL 1993 *Research Findings* and Struck and White)

Except for the forces that cause bad weather, all the items listed above can be addressed. Schools waste a lot of time with inappropriate instruction (teaching things students already know and teaching things students are not yet able to learn) and inefficient use of summers, Walberg says (in Kirschenbaum). Time-wasting at home is at least as much of a concern as lost time at school. For example, high school students watch an average of twenty-eight hours of television a week, which not only wastes time but

"may actually do them harm by getting them into a sedentary and passive lifestyle" (Walberg, in Kirschenbaum).

Stuck and White recommend steps educators can take to reduce the amount of time that is wasted. "Whether the amount of improvement possible is slight or dramatic, with administrative support, increasing the time [teachers] spend teaching and the time their students are on task requires neither expense nor special training, and it is almost guaranteed to result in higher student achievement." Administrators and teachers can reduce the amount of time that is wasted in schools by doing the following:

- developing schoolwide plans to increase attendance
- enforcing tardiness rules
- strictly limiting intercom use
- minimizing interruptions from visitors and other external distractions
- reserving 90 percent of classroom time for instruction
- preparing a list of expected classroom behaviors, teaching students how to behave based on those rules, and responding quickly and consistently to all disruptive behavior in the classroom
- starting classes within the first minute of the class period
- preparing all instructional materials and activities beforehand
- directing relevant questions to all students
- ensuring that all students experience high rates of success on school tasks
- devoting their full attention to supervising students engaged in seatwork
- presenting clear and succinct directions and ensuring all students are paying attention while directions are being presented

## Length of School Year and Day

"It is time to break the envelope of the instructional day, i.e., the 5-6 hour day and the 180 day school year," Ted Sanders advised the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL *Highlights*). Sanders' argument rests on the fact that not all children are cut from the same mold; therefore, "their learning needs are different." He believes that the traditional school day and year "are a classic case of displaced priorities."

Year-round schooling is a popular response to dealing with school overcrowding; instead of building new schools, shorter vacations are spread throughout the full year. By 1991, some 1,668 schools in 23 states offered

year-round schooling; the increase from 1990-91 was 83 percent (Hazelton and colleagues).

Supporters of year-round schooling argue that it prevents the loss of learning that occurs during long summer breaks. So far, evidence suggests that learning retention is reduced during the summer break for disadvantaged students, but researchers disagree on whether advantaged students have any loss of learning retention.

As far as cost is concerned, the multitrack system (which uses staggered terms so that schools are open continuously and students take their breaks at different times) is preferable to the single-track program (which keeps all students in school or on vacation at the same time). Hazelton and colleagues found that multitrack year-round schools offer "potential capital savings due to more efficient use of facilities," whereas single-track year-round programs "are likely to cost as much or more than schools operating under the traditional nine-month calendar." In single-track programs, funding often comes from monies previously allocated to summer school, and additional support may be needed.

Whether extending the school year will have an effect on student achievement is debated. During a roundtable discussion sponsored by the NECTL (*Highlights*), Susan Fuhrman "expressed mixed feelings about expanding time when we're not using time very well now" and argued that school officials need to determine whether additional time will actually be used differently.

Some proponents of more school time advocate adding an extra year of schooling to precollege education.

Kindergarten is now mandatory in at least seven states; some want full-day or two-year kindergarten, with more attention paid to academics than play. But it is doubtful that such changes will be implemented any time soon on a grand scale. The problem, says Nancy Karweit (1992), is that "we simply do not have an adequate, replicated research base on which to base decisions about kindergarten education."

Finally, some educators believe more time can be found by starting children in school at a younger age or lengthening the school day. Zigler argues that if the school day was aligned with the typical parent's work schedule—that is, if schools were open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. for pre- and after-school care—schools "would not lose school bond issues all over the country because schools will... meet people's needs" (in NECTL *Highlights*).

Longer class hours, weekend classes, variable-length class periods, and more classes offered during the school day are all options being tried by schools attempting to provide students with more classroom time. As David T. Conley (1993) points out, school buildings are an underutilized resource in most communities; extending the time they are used for teaching "will not

only help improve education for these children, but also can strengthen the sense of community that surrounds the school." Douglas County High School in Georgia added a seventh period for enrichment or tutorial programs, while Carl Sandburg Middle School in Alexandria, Virginia, has an afterschool program for at-risk youth. Other schools are trying block classes—fewer but longer classes in a school day.

Those who argue for lengthening the school year are facing a financial hurdle: some estimate it would cost $33 billion annually to extend the school year from 180 to 210 days (Del Stover 1994). Public schools in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, have overcome the cost problem by charging tuition of $10-$26 a week and hiring staff independent of the regular faculty to oversee their extended-school-year program, in which about half of the district's 4,800 students are enrolled. Since 1986, the schools have been open 12 hours a day, offering daycare services; music lessons; classes in art, foreign language, and science; sports and recreation; tutoring programs; and summer programs. "All of this is tuition-based," says Becci Bookner, director of the district's program. "None of our operation is an additional burden to taxpayers" (in Stover).

What supporters of lengthening the school day and year don't often address is that only some students need more time to meet academic goals. Students are individuals; some students take ten minutes and some take six hours to learn a day's lesson (Stover). The NECTL says, "Every professional educator understands the inherent fallacy of requiring each child to spend the same number of hours in school, complete the same number of courses, [and] attend school for the same number of years" (in Stover). This issue can be addressed by making extra school days or hours optional or only mandatory for low-performing students.

The Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century calls for an increase in the number of school days to 185 by 1996, 200 by 2000, and 220 by 2010. But, as Conley notes, critics of the act point out that funding authorization was not provided and there is a "lack of guarantees that anything different will happen during the additional days. Little will be accomplished if a student experiences failure for 220 days a year instead of 180."

## Time and Coursework

To compete internationally, the NECTL believes U.S. schools need to double the time students study academics, devoting at least five and a half hours daily to English, mathematics, and science. If extracurricular courses are to be offered, the commission says, then the school day and year must be lengthened ("Schools Must . . . ").

The NECTL contends that only half of the average U.S. student's school day is spent studying academics; the other half is spent on electives, physical education, and other such courses. In Japan, France, and Germany, however, high school students spend five-and-half hours a day studying academics. "Unless we provide the time needed for academic learning and use that time well, the education reform movement will flounder," says NECLT's executive director, Milton Goldberg (in "Schools Must . . . ").

One way teachers are making more efficient use of the curriculum is by giving assignments that span more than one subject area. Kathleen Hering, principal of Calapooia Middle School in Albany, Oregon, said that because class size is larger, "teachers are having to learn different strategies for time use. For example, this year the communication teachers combined with the science teacher, and the students were assigned a science topic for their research report."

## Providing Teachers with Time for Professional Development

School restructuring has enlarged teachers' roles—for example, giving them greater involvement in decision-making—and created a need for training in new instructional strategies. "The traditional view of a teacher's work is governed by the idea that time with students is of singular value," note Gary D. Watts and Shari Castle (1993). "Professional development is somehow not seen as related directly to instruction." Since teachers' roles are changing, particularly with the advent of school-based management and total quality management, "our thinking about how a teacher's time is organized must change as well."

Most educators and researchers believe that teachers need more time for professional development. In a study of 400 schools, June Cox and colleagues (1985) found that successful schools "depend on carefully directed staff development." Mary McCaslin and Thomas L. Good (1992) write that most teachers work hard but have little professional-development time. For school restructuring to work and for problem-solving curricula to be implemented, the authors assert, "it will be necessary to find some ways to restructure schooling so that teachers have time for continual professional development during the normal work week." At Roosevelt Middle School in Eugene, Oregon, for example, block scheduling provides teachers with release time (Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools 1993).

### Ways of Obtaining Professional-Development Time

Ways of obtaining professional-development and planning time for

## More Time for Teachers

Watts and Castle found that schools are increasing the professional-development time available for teachers by doing the following:

- restructuring the school day or rescheduling time (such as adding instructional time to the first four days of the school week so that students can be released early on the fifth and teachers will have that afternoon for professional-development work)
- designating "common times" for teaching team members to have the same planning periods available
- using existing time more effectively (such as communicating through e-mail, bulletin boards, newsletters, and folders, and using team teaching)
- "buying" time (such as paying for mini-retreats, hiring substitutes by using grant money, sharing one teaching assignment if heavily involved in restructuring)
- giving teachers "inservice credits" for developing programs on their own time

*Source*: Watts and Castle 1993

teachers recommended by the NEA, NECTL, Associated Schools Project, and Watts and Castle include the following:

- hiring substitutes, teaching assistants, and college interns to take over classes periodically
- having administrators or support staff take over classes on occasion
- providing the most professional-development time to teachers of at-risk students
- reorganizing the school schedule
- involving local businesses to provide financial support for substitutes
- using team teaching so that one teacher can fill in for another when necessary
- combining classes for certain activities
- freeing teachers by allowing students to attend all-day offsite learning experiences (such as a theater performance, lecture, or school-to-work program)
- enlisting parent, business, and community volunteers to oversee activities and programs
- allowing teachers to have more flexible scheduling patterns
- shifting control over the structuring of time from administrators to teachers
- regularly scheduling an early release to give teachers time to collaborate

Another idea is a "theme and team-teaching" arrangement in which, on certain Friday afternoons, teachers from three grades combine and presenta-

tions are given by parents, older students, business volunteers, and teachers from one of the three grades. The teachers from the other two grades are then freed up for professional development.

Finally, one way to increase time for professional development is to "help teachers develop a manageable record-keeping system that allows them to monitor student progress without undo loss of instructional time" (June Cox and colleagues).

**How Professional Development Time Should Be Used**

The NEA believes teachers must be trusted to use profitably their noninstructional time. Collaboration with peers is an important way to use professional-development time, the NEA notes: "Too frequently, current professional development activities are restricted to district-mandated workshops, training programs, and inservice" when "the single most important and necessary resource for effective school improvement is time with colleagues."

At Calapooia Middle School in Albany, Oregon, the district has allowed eight half-days of professional development time for teachers. Students do not attend school any fewer days than they did before. Principal Kathleen Hering stresses that they try not to fill up all the teachers' professional days with speakers, when "what they really need is time to plan together."

Professional development "must be a part of any successful strategy for improving teaching and learning in the nation's schools," concludes Murnane. The reason is simple: Many teachers do not know how to teach in a manner that promotes the type of curricular goals specified in the NCTM *Standards* document or in the curricular frameworks for science, writing, and other subjects that many states are developing. Professional development should be tied to curricular goals, combined with substantive knowledge with hands-on practice in new methods of teaching, and combined with inclass assistance to teachers on instructional methods (Murnane).

Finding the time teachers and students need to learn and accomplish all that is expected of them will continue to be a challenge for those concerned about children's education. The central question to focus on is What will serve students best academically? The answer is not a simple one, but the very process of pursuing it should generate innovative solutions to many of the problems plaguing today's schools.

*Chapter 3*

# People as Resources: Parents, Community Organizations, Businesses, and Students

Most school reforms in the first half of the twentieth century increased the separation between schools and their immediate communities, says Conley. But times are changing—due to concern over finances, calls for accountability, the changing workplace, and social concerns. A new relationship between schools and communities is developing, one that "appears to be necessary for schools to survive and adapt in the future," says Conley. "This new relationship entails both parent and community involvement in the schools. It also involves the movement of children from schools to the community for portions of their education."

Through networking, partnerships, and collaboration, a schoolwide community is developed. More schools are finding that success depends on support from parents, businesses, special-interest groups, and community organizations. " 'You must network with the community you serve,' explains one principal. 'We turn to our community council of 32 contributing businesses and service agencies to help us support our students. We just cannot do it ourselves' " (Pechman and Fiester).

Reasons for involving the community in school decision-making and academics include the following:

- Volunteers lead to cost savings for the school.
- Teachers will have a reduced workload and more free time for planning and professional development.

- The school and district will get a better sense of students' needs.
- Community members are happier with—and more likely to financially support—schools they are directly connected with.
- Business leaders can provide expertise in management for administrators and necessary job skills for students.
- Community members and businesses provide goods and services so that schools can maximize the resources they have.

By collaborating with businesses and social agencies, schools can strengthen their human and financial resources, writes Peterson - del Mar:

> Broadening education to include extensive and intensive internships in community businesses shifts educational responsibility and expense to a greater number of people and organizations. Collaborating closely with human-service providers can ensure that schools do not duplicate work that might be more appropriately handled by another agency. Parents and other community members who are invited into schools' decision-making processes are more likely to promote adequate educational funding. Given the generally hostile climate toward taxation, these advantages of collaborative restructuring cannot be overlooked.

Successful schools invite the community to be part of the education process, from using business-school partnerships to elaborate community-school networks. "Collaboratively, we can share common resources for the greater good of all students," said Gene Sharratt, superintendent of a Washington ESD. "The old idea of the stand-alone school is really passé. Successful schools in our region are schools that reach out and develop these strong partnerships and a sense of community and a place called community where the school is actually seen as the hub." Sharratt said the probability of securing grants is greater when people collaborate, which means districts can benefit financially from collaboration. In addition, in some states, said Sharratt, many of the legislatures' funding models are collaboratively based, "so to be fundable, you must have collaboration."

Following are brief descriptions of how parents, community organizations, and businesses are working with schools to bring about improved student achievement. For more information on how schools are building coalitions with these three groups, see the Oregon School Study Council Bulletin *Building Coalitions to Restructure Schools* (Peterson - del Mar).

## Parents as Resources

Parent involvement in schools has tremendous benefits for children. "Studies have shown that students get better grades, have better attitudes toward school and have higher aspirations if parents are aware of what's

happening in school and encourage their children," says Leon Lynn (1994). James M. Ferris (1992) also believes that involving parents will lead to improved student performance: "The parents are the key not only because they are the direct consumers but also because they have a role to play in terms of the home inputs that are essential to educational outcomes."

Families provide the "social, cultural, and emotional supports" needed by children to do well in school, say James P. Comer and Norris M. Haynes (1991). Parents participate in school activities and site-based councils, as well as form their own school-related organizations and teams.

Success for All (SFA), directed toward at-risk elementary students, stresses parent involvement as an important part of its support program by "teaching parents strategies for working with their children, e.g., literacy activities, homework, and dealing with attendance problems" (NECTL *Highlights*). Each SFA school (currently there are eighty-five SFA schools in nineteen states) has a full-time facilitator and involves counselors, social workers, teachers, and other staff members to assist parents in supporting their children's learning.

Richmond Elementary School in Oregon's Salem-Keizer School District is an example of a school "where parents as well as children can learn," say Pechman and Fiester. The school's partnership program, Together With Families, encourages parents to "take various leadership roles within the school and the community, offering parenting courses and meeting in neighborhood homes to learn how to foster children's learning in school and at home."

At South Salem High School, parents volunteer as hall monitors, tutors, and mentors, reports Peterson - del Mar: "Twenty-five to thirty adults with strong skills in math, science, foreign language, or some other discipline tutor students who need additional help. Another fifteen to twenty serve as mentors, a broadly defined role that includes counseling and advising students in their academic, vocational, and personal lives."

## Working with Community Organizations

Partnerships with social-service agencies are becoming increasingly important to schools with limited resources and students who have social and other problems. Schools alone cannot deal with the complex social and emotional needs of students, though they are sometimes expected to. Some schools are developing partnerships with community organizations, working together to address social problems. Other schools are trying to step out of the "social agenda" altogether, preferring to let the community deal with social problems so they can focus on educating students.

Tutoring programs improve academic achievement, particularly

among at-risk students, but such programs can be costly. To reduce costs of operating such programs, some schools are enlisting community volunteers as tutors. At Patrick Henry Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia, tutors are recruited through the school's two adopt-a-school partners—Cameron Station, a nearby Army base, and the U.S. Defense Logistics Agency (Leila R. Engman 1992). Twice a week, volunteers work with children after school for seventy minutes, alternating between a computer lab and desk work. According to Engman, students in the program show improvement in skills, standardized test scores, grades, attitude, and self-esteem during the school year.

At the Graham and Parks Alternative Public School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, community groups volunteer in the following ways, says Principal Len Solo (1992):

- The Cambridge School Volunteers meet with Haitian children after school three times weekly for two hours, focusing on basic skills and homework.
- The Margaret Fuller House, a neighborhood organization that recruits, trains, and supervises volunteer tutors from Harvard University, provides tutoring for English-speaking students in grades 5-8.
- Harvard Law School and Phillips Brooks House (an organization of African-American students) provide Harvard students to recruit, train, and match Big Brothers and Big Sisters with students, as well as provide a coordinator to run the program.
- In addition, the school and students benefit from an apprenticeship program wherein eighth-graders are placed and supervised in "meaningful work situations in the community," such as hospitals, law clinics, auto repair facilities, and veterinary clinics.
- The Lotus Corporation, serving as the school's business partner, has funded a computerized research and writing center, provided services to assist administration, offered employee volunteers as mentors for students, and provided space and meals for work and planning groups.
- Collaborative efforts with nearby colleges and organizations include a computer-oriented student-learning and staff development project planned with the help of Massachusetts Institute of Technology staff.

"Clearly," concludes Solo, "the use of community resources has enabled our school to meet our students' needs, expanded our students' learning possibilities, and allowed our staff to grow and develop." Academically, he says, over 90 percent of the school's students pass the state's basic skills tests, most of them in the 90th percentile, and the attendance rate is about 96 percent.

When Oregon's Bend-LaPine School District had to make significant cuts in extracurricular and athletic programs, the community rallied to save those programs. Superintendent Scott Mutchie said, "We cut 50 percent, and some very supportive parents and community members came back and raised the money so we'd have the full activities." The community has continued to support these programs for the past two years. "The community came to the table and helped the district salvage those programs. In addition, we have a school foundation that works very hard to supplement district programs with field trips and other things the district can't absorb." As an example, Mutchie cites a program wherein students and teachers can apply for monies to support certain projects.

## Working with Businesses

Businesses can provide schools with funds, personnel, expertise, and other resources. Peterson - del Mar explains the benefits of such partnerships: "Collaborative efforts with business have the potential to both improve students' educational experience and to create postgraduate employment." Many schools are welcoming such partnerships, and businesses are recognizing that commitment to the community includes school involvement. According to Joseph A. Pichler (1991), "Companies across the entire spectrum of size, industry, and geographic region have adopted the goal of educational improvement as a key dimension of their civic responsibilities."

Hanushek and colleagues advise businesses to become more involved with schools instead of merely complaining about the quality of workers they receive; businesses should provide input about requirements, insist on high performance, show interest in students' academic performance, provide their employees with time to work in schools, and help schools develop performance incentives for school personnel.

Business leaders often expect schools to improve dramatically without more funding, says Conley, but they do not fully "understand or appreciate the challenges" facing schools. When businesses become involved with schools, understanding grows.

"Partnerships are crucial," said Robert Barkley, Jr., a manager of the NEA National Center for Innovation (interview, February 6, 1995). For example, in Greece, New York, a suburb of Rochester, high technology businesses such as Kodak and Xerox employ many of the school district's parents and former students, "so it was quite natural that those companies along with the school district would look at what students need to know in order to be successful in those kinds of businesses. Together, they came up with a list of 70 or 80 standards that they put into place." The district realized it needed to work with the companies to determine what changes were

required in schools to ensure graduates were prepared for the workplace. One recommendation was that statistical thinking should be emphasized in math classes. Barkley explained:

> Modern companies rely on employees making decisions on the line. They want people who can make wise decisions; an awareness of statistical variation is important; statistical thinking is one of the bases of critical thinking. So the district started teaching statistics in the fourth grade. Students are constantly exposed to statistical thinking and are equipped with that kind of awareness. It is a good process for improving the quality of graduates, but it also brought the major employers of the district into a position of support for the school district, which is helpful for raising funds. The companies believe that this district is supportive of them, so they are supportive of the district.

Barkley said a "deep" partnership exists, one that continues to this day, with the district and the companies continually looking for ways to improve student learning. Students serve as interns in the companies, and management personnel provide input to the schools on management philosophy.

Doug Smith, principal of John F. Kennedy Middle School in Eugene, Oregon, said that business partnerships have "worked out well" at his school. "One of the local rest homes is working with our kids, as are a couple daycare centers and several restaurants. Business relationships keep elective options—or choice for kids—in place in spite of the cutbacks in programs, without totally exhausting our work force." The teachers, he said, have professional-development and class-preparation time when the students are participating in work-experience practicums.

Calapooia Middle School has a very active partnership with the city of Albany. "We've put together a job shadowing program for students," said Principal Kathleen Hering. "The students can miss a day or a half day of school to shadow a city employee. Students must write a report on their experience and present it when they get back." The city of Albany also provides a speakers bureau for the classrooms and provides tips on management issues. "They're there if we need them," said Hering. "They are a resource for us." The students reciprocate; they created a coloring book about Albany that the city will be distributing in the community.

Government Hill Elementary School in Anchorage, Alaska, worked with the PTA and the school's business partner, Alaska Railroad, to conduct "On the Right Track," a program that encourages students to build a paper train based on the amount of reading they do (Anchorage School District 1995). "We wanted to show that you don't have to spend a lot of money to organize a successful reading program," said program coordinator and parent Susan Suiter. The total cost: $150 contributed by the PTA. Bob Yost, train engineer at Alaska Railroad, visited the students, passing out paper engineer

hats and encouragement. Mardell Kiesel, district reading coordinator, said, "It doesn't take a lot of money. An effort like this takes just that—effort."

## School-to-Work Programs

One way schools and businesses have collaborated is through school-to-work programs, which give students hands-on experience. Such programs have the following benefits, notes the CED: They "establish recognized vocational credentials, help correct real or perceived skill mismatches in the labor market, connect academic and applied learning, and provide meaningful work experiences." Business must have "a strong role" in such areas as curriculum development and evaluation, then, in order to guide and legitimize school-to-work programs.

Many educators object to the notion that their central purpose is to prepare workers, says Conley; however, he acknowledges that "there are ever increasing indications that the linkages between education and economic viability for individuals and nations are stronger than ever."

Superintendent Mutchie said he has seen more school-to-work transitions emerge recently. "There is much more business involvement than in the past. We are forming more partnerships with businesses, creating an apprenticeship program in cabinet making, engineering, and so forth." When asked why, Mutchie replied, "It's because of the relevancy issue. We're finding that kids need hands-on experience to put into use the learning they get in the classroom."

Yvonne Katz of Oregon's Beaverton School District said that schools are realizing how much collaborative relationships benefit students. "We are working with all the school districts in Washington County in a consortium along with the division of higher education of Portland Community College and three corporations—Intel, Sequent, and Tektronix—to establish a regional high school program." The pilot program will be in place for the 1995-96 school year, and by 1996 the permanent program should be operational.

"The corporations will move their educational programs to the campus, the community college will have a major role, and we'll have an eleventh- and twelfth-grade program," Katz said. "All will share in the expenses and pool our resources." The benefits to the students, said Katz, are that they will have more educational options for job placement with corporations and businesses in the community. The involvement of companies in Washington County, Oregon, like in Greece, New York, helps ensure that students receive practical training in the areas valued by the companies.

## Advantages of Peer Tutoring

Advantages of peer tutoring are cited by Joan Gaustad in *Tutoring for At-Risk Students* (1992), an Oregon School Study Council Bulletin:

- Peer tutors are more likely to interpret the nonverbal behavior of their tutees than experienced teachers because they are cognitively closer to their peers.
- Because they use the same informal language and gestures, peer tutors may be better able to present the subject matter in terms understandable to tutees.
- Tutors often have special empathy with younger low achievers because they experienced the same problems.
- At-risk children may identify with a child close in age and ethnic or social background; therefore, tutors serve to model study skills.
- Having an older, higher status friend as a tutor can enhance a tutee's self-esteem.
- Tutors often make academic progress themselves.
- Tutors' self-esteem may increase.
- Tutors may improve in communication skills and work habits.

*Source*: Gaustad 1992

## Students as Resources: Peer Tutoring

As mentioned earlier, one-on-one tutoring is especially helpful to students with special needs. For example, the program Success for All uses individual tutoring to help at-risk elementary students learn. The tutors are usually certified teachers who "work with the children in daily 20-minute blocks for 8-week periods, or for as long as the children need it" (NECTL *Highlights*). Studies show that SFA students do "substantially better than students in control groups, with the greatest effects among students who start in the lowest 25% of their groups."

But tutoring takes time, and schools often cannot afford to hire additional teachers as tutors. "Redistributing existing human and financial resources may provide the means to implement a tutoring program," writes Joan Gaustad (1992), who adds that many schools use Chapter 1 funds to support tutoring programs.

Another increasingly popular solution is to use students as peer tutors. At Willamette High School in Eugene, Oregon, peer tutors receive academic credit for a six-week training class and service for twelve weeks as tutors. Most tutors are recruited through personal invitation (Gaustad). At George Westinghouse High School in Brooklyn, New York, teachers found that the high failure rate was caused by "lack of tutoring and a failure to complete homework" (Mike Schmoker 1994). They turned their school around by using peer tutors:

> Students initiated a "lunch and learn" program where they could seek tutoring from more successful peers. Throughout that semester, they

# BULLETIN IN BRIEF

OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL

Condensed from OSSC Bulletin

Vol. 38, No. 9 • May 1995

# Priority on Learning

*By Lori Jo Oswald*

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. The officials who manage today's schools and school districts might agree, as they devise innovative ways of employing financial and human resources and instructional strategies to ensure that student learning is not slighted during a time when school funding is tight.

To keep student learning a top priority, many educators also believe that the multitude of mandates and policies enacted at the federal, state, and district levels should be scrutinized, for ill-conceived, contradictory, or overly strict policies can inadvertently stifle rather than support learning.

## Resource Allocation

To aid student success, existing funds need to be put where they are needed most—in the classroom.

To some extent, the monies available to schools can be increased merely by shifting district funds. For example, in Texas, the Office of the State Auditor (1993) concluded that Texas school districts could save $185 million annually by cutting costs outside the classroom: "In some cases, staff sizes are excessive, and fringe benefits are generous. Certain districts have serious weaknesses in purchasing of goods and services. In addition, some employee and board member travel expenses are extravagant."

The state auditor's report also predicted an additional $45 million could be saved annually in Texas by making other changes, including the following: developing a statewide property self-insurance pool so that districts are not overpaying for property insurance, controling textbook costs by providing an annual allotment to each district for textbook purchases, and reducing tax-collection costs by eliminating tax-collection offices and contracting with county governments to collect taxes.

### Streamlining Administration and Support Services

Many districts are streamlining administration and support services to free up resources for instruction. With the implementation of site-based councils at many schools handling budgeting, personnel selection, and curriculum, for example, the need for some administrators at the district level has been eliminated. Unsupported, expensive policy mandates are being eliminated whenever politically possible. New functions and personnel are not being added without eliminating those that are "duplicative or no longer necessary," says the Committee for Economic Development (CED) (1994).

### Time and Student Achievement

Improving time management in schools will

The Oregon School Study Council—an organization of member school districts in the state—is a service of the College of Education, University of Oregon.

This issue of Bulletin in Brief is condensed from *Priority on Learning: How School Districts Are Concentrating Their Scarce Resources on Academics*, by Lori Jo Oswald, OSSC Bulletin, Vol. 38, No. 9, May 1995. 61 pages. For ordering information, see page 4.

cost nothing, yet can positively affect student achievement.

Schools waste a lot of time with inappropriate instruction (teaching things students already know and teaching things students are not yet able to learn) and inefficient use of summers, Walberg says (in Kirschenbaum 1993).

## People as Resources

Parents, community organizations, and businesses are important human resources being cultivated by many schools. Community volunteerism is an exciting and successful method of dealing with diverse student populations and tight school budgets.

Through networking, partnerships, and collaboration, a schoolwide community is developed. Reasons for involving the community in school decision-making and academics include the following:

- Volunteers lead to cost savings for the school.
- Teachers will have a reduced workload and more free time for planning and professional development.
- The school and district will get a better sense of students' needs.
- Community members are happier with—and more likely to financially support—schools they are directly connected with.
- Business leaders can provide expertise in management for administrators and necessary job skills for students.
- Community members and businesses provide goods and services so that schools can maximize the resources they have.

Successful schools invite the community to be part of the education process, from using business-school partnerships to elaborate community-school networks.

### Parents as Resources

Parent involvement in schools has tremendous benefits for children. "Studies have shown that students get better grades, have better attitudes toward school and have higher aspirations if parents are aware of what's happening in school and encourage their children," says Lynn (1994). Ferris (1992) also believes that involving parents will lead to improved student performance: "The parents are the key not only because they are the direct consumers but also because they have a role to play in terms of the home inputs that are essential to educational outcomes."

### Working with Community Organizations

Partnerships with social-service agencies are becoming increasingly important to schools with limited resources and students who have social and other problems. Some schools work with community organizations to address social problems. Other schools are trying to step out of the "social agenda" altogether, preferring to let the community deal with social problems so they can focus on educating students.

Tutoring programs improve academic achievement, particularly among at-risk students, but such programs can be costly. To reduce costs of operating such programs, some schools are enlisting community volunteers as tutors.

### Working with Businesses

Businesses can provide schools with funds, personnel, expertise, and other resources. Peterson - del Mar explains the benefits of such partnerships: "Collaborative efforts with business have the potential to both improve students' educational experience and to create postgraduate employment."

One way schools and businesses have collaborated is through school-to-work programs, which give students hands-on experience. Such programs have the following benefits, notes the CED: They "establish recognized vocational credentials, help correct real or perceived skill mismatches in the labor market, connect academic and applied learning, and provide meaningful work experiences." Business must have "a strong role" in such areas as curriculum development and evaluation, then, in order to guide and legitimize school-to-work programs.

## Instructional Strategies That Promote Learning

A wide variety of issues are related to improving student achievement through instructional strategies, including considering the individuality and self-esteem of students; targeting at-risk and special-needs students; and using block plans, team teaching, or cooperative learning as methods.

The task of meeting students' needs presents many difficulties for schools and districts today, since those needs are so varied. American schools have a uniquely diverse student population. Children from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as children with physical and emotional disabilities, attend public schools. Serving such a diverse student population can be both challenging and expensive.

### Targeting Certain Student Populations

With limited monies and a more diverse student population in need of instruction, many schools are finding it necessary to channel resources to two groups: at-risk students and disabled students.

Schools are finding cost-effective ways to help at-risk students improve academically, especially by involving tutors (often volunteers from the community) and parents. Whatever the school's approach, there is little question that the numbers and needs of at-risk students will continue to increase in the near future.

Providing special education is essential—and expensive—in public schools today. The term *special education* is a broad-based umbrella that incorporates a number of other categories, such as learning disabled, health impaired, emotionally disturbed, and so forth. In addition, some school districts classify at-risk students (both due to poverty and "language at-risk") as special-education students in order to receive federal funding.

Many issues surround special education: how to use special-education funds wisely, how to define special education, whether to use pullout or inclusion programs, and whether to hire teachers trained in handling special-education children are just a few.

### Teaching Methods and Styles

Many schools are attempting to change teaching methods as an economical way of improving academic achievement. Three common classroom approaches that promote student outcomes while dealing with tight resources are block plans, work teams, and cooperative learning.

The block plan addresses school finance problems through innovative scheduling—reducing the number of classes that students take and that teachers teach in a given school day. James M. Carroll (1994) says cutbacks in school financing and teaching staff can be offset by the way the block plan "fundamentally changes the way schools use time." For example, classes are taught in much longer periods, and they meet for only part of the school year; therefore, students and teachers have fewer classes each day.

Team teaching is being heralded as a way of sharing new ideas and methods, maintaining student interest, freeing teachers' time for professional development, and preventing teacher burnout.

The assumption of cooperative learning is that students in small, carefully structured learning teams who are rewarded based on the progress made by all team members help one another learn, gain in achievement and self-esteem, and have more respect for their classmates (Johns Hopkins Team Learning Project undated). According to Johns Hopkins researchers, group goals and individual accountability are the important criteria that must be in place for team learning to be successful.

According to Mitman and Lambert (1993), students working in peer groups have a greater opportunity to "participate actively in the learning process" and therefore increase their time-on-task. Second, students learn by giving feedback to each other, having to explain their reasoning. Finally, "peer interaction is aligned with adolescents' preferences and, thus, facilitates more positive attitudes toward learning."

## Policies Favoring Student Learning

Money alone cannot ensure student achievement. Often ill-conceived policies at the state, district, and school levels prevent innovative use of existing funds. Useful policies focus on such issues as curricular goals, assessment of student skills and academic achievement, professional development for teachers, and treatment of at-risk and learning-disabled students. Additional or overly strict policies can stifle rather than support education.

The consensus among educators and researchers is that policy-makers need to "back off." Schools must be freed of educational regulations and mandates, such as those related to class size, school time spent on a particular subject, and centralized textbook adoption, says the CED, for these prevent unique educational programs from being developed.

Another problem is that policies from the

federal, state, district, and school levels often contradict each other. The real concern is that students may suffer because of this confusion: "The array of mandates, guidelines, incentives, sanctions and programs" drain schools of their energies to pursue serious school improvement (Consortium for Policy Research in Education 1991).

It is difficult for schools to redesign educational services to improve student learning when they are limited by federal, state, local, and union contract rules and regulations: "A serious results-oriented system would de-emphasize regulations and focus accountability on what students actually learned," states Odden.

The Research and Policy Committee of the CED calls for policy-makers to stop adding "mission upon mission, mandate upon mandate, onto already overburdened schools, diluting and deflecting the schools' ability to fulfill their educational goals."

## Conclusion

Districts and schools are finding innovative ways to deal with the challenges of restricted budgets and expanding student populations and needs. From examining the literature and talking with principals and superintendents, one comes away with the sense that educators care deeply about students' academic success. The number one priority for those involved in education continues to be the children themselves.

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monitored progress—and took corrective action. By the end of the semester, the number of students failing all subjects dropped to 11 (from 151 of 1,700 students)—a 9.26 percent improvement in five months.

Parents, community organizations, businesses, and student peers are important human resources being cultivated by many schools. Community volunteerism is an exciting and successful method of dealing with diverse student populations and tight school budgets. But, as the next chapter makes clear, classroom techniques can also have a tremendous impact on student achievement.

*Chapter 4*

# Instructional Strategies That Promote Learning

The task of meeting students' needs presents many difficulties for schools and districts today, since those needs are so varied. American schools have a uniquely diverse student population. Children from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as children with physical and emotional disabilities, attend public schools. Serving such a diverse student population can be both challenging and expensive.

## The Schoolwide-Projects Approach

For many schools, one response has been to shift to a schoolwide-projects approach. According to Pechman and Fiester, who studied Chapter 1 schools, focusing students from the beginning on "meaningful academic content" through schoolwide projects that draw on students' life experiences is a successful method of meeting students' needs. The projects make use of a variety of instructional strategies geared to meeting students' needs.

> Teachers in schoolwide projects personalize learning through interactive teaching methods: problem solving, multicultural themes, team activities, cooperative learning, individual tutoring, and portfolio assessment. They remove the traditional emphasis on sequential learning and teach higher-order concepts simultaneously with basic skills. Interdisciplinary curricula projects replace basal readers and traditional textbooks; students with different levels of preparation work together on the same problem or curriculum, each contributing to the group's product. Teachers focus on how students think, tracking closely how their knowledge develops and bridging gaps they observe. (Pechman and Fiester)

Schoolwide projects, which are based on principles of "effective and

equitable education for all," are a means of supporting special-needs children. Such projects have the following advantages, according to Pechman and Fiester:

- Because they are developed at the school site, they can be freely adapted to the children they serve (some projects emphasize "effective schools" while others use projects based on approaches often used with talented and gifted students).
- The emphasis on advance planning makes collaboration easier.
- Supplementary instructional options can be created for children, including extending learning time by lengthening the school day or year, having specialists or tutors team teach with regular-classroom teachers, or adding supplementary content to the basic program.
- Parents and the community become educational partners, providing the schools with extra services and resources.

Eight features are commonly found in schools implementing a schoolwide-projects approach: (1) an agreed-upon vision for all students, based on higher academic standards and academic designs and plans to implement the vision; (2) a clear focus on academic achievement; (3) extended planning and a collaborative design; (4) a well-defined organization and management structure; (5) a strong professional community; (6) cultural inclusiveness; (7) parent and community involvement; and (8) evidence of student and school success (Pechman and Fiester).

## Targeting Certain Student Populations

With limited monies and a more diverse student population in need of instruction, many schools are finding it necessary to channel resources to two groups: at-risk students and disabled students. These groups are defined briefly below, and recent instructional strategies for assisting them are mentioned.

### At-Risk Students

An "at-risk" student is defined by Robert E. Slavin and Nancy A. Madden (1989) as "in danger of failing to complete his or her education with an adequate level of skills" because of one or more risk factors: "low achievement, retention in grade, behavior problems, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students." Schools are now finding cost-effective ways to help at-risk students improve academically, especially by involving tutors (often volunteers from the community) and parents.

## Recognizing Individuality

Successful schools recognize students' individual uniqueness, says Gene Sharratt (1993), by doing the following:

- appreciating individual differences
- tolerating those unable to meet expectations
- accepting flexible and varied student work patterns
- promoting respect for uniqueness
- making judgments and evaluations primarily on a personal basis

*Source*: Sharratt 1993

The Accelerated Schools Project (ASP), which addresses the educational needs of at-risk students, takes an approach that is opposite to the usual treatment of at-risk students: Instead of slowing down academic instruction, ASP treats all its clients as if they are talented and gifted and speeds up their instruction (NECTL *Highlights*).

Zuckman points out that many schools receiving Chapter 1 funds use "pullout" programs, wherein children are removed from their regular class for thirty minutes each day for remedial work in reading or math. The problems with this are that not only do students lose thirty minutes of class time, but they are stigmatized. Also, many educators believe, as Zuckman does, that remedial instruction "should be replaced with a more demanding and enriching program of 'higher order thinking skills,' which would involve more analysis and creating thinking." The implementation of schoolwide Chapter 1 programs has generally addressed these problems.

Whatever the school's approach, there is little question that the numbers and needs of at-risk students will continue to increase in the near future. Tips for tutoring at-risk children are discussed in detail in the OSSC Bulletin *Tutoring for At-Risk Students* (Gaustad). Also useful is Betty Jean Eklund Shoemaker's *Integrative Education: A Curriculum for the Twenty-First Century* (1989).

### Disabled Students

Providing special education is essential—and expensive—in public schools today.

The term *special education* is a broad-based umbrella that incorporates a number of other categories, such as learning disabled, health impaired, emotionally disturbed, and so forth. In addition, some school districts classify at-risk students (both due to poverty and "language at-risk") as special-education students in order to receive federal funding. "It's real important in this area," says Sharratt, "to define your terms." He adds that the approval process for receiving special-education dollars is a long and difficult one:

> There are tremendous costs involved. Dollar for dollar, if you look at the rise in educational expenditures, there's almost an exact correlation between costs in treating special needs kids. So many kids are coming into the classrooms that are bent, battered, and broken and have tremendous needs that have to be met in order to gain anything

> from the classroom experience. The model for treating these kids has changed dramatically. Now all students regardless of their abilities will have an equal opportunity in the classroom. Some students have such profound disabilities that they are very expensive to educate. That presents a dilemma for administrators; they are trying to find money to educate everyone. It is impossible to keep pace with the expenditure demands of the students.

Sharratt said his district has moved to an inclusion model (see OSSC Bulletin *Inclusive Education in Practice* by Karen Irmsher, February 1995). Teacher aides come into the regular classroom to assist disabled students instead of pulling them out of the classroom.

Richard J. Murnane (1994) says that in many schools, "the allocation of resources to students classified as handicapped" under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) takes place separately from the allocation of resources to other students:

> This is sometimes a significant deterrent to efficient use of scarce resources. Given the magnitude of special education funding in most urban districts and the scarcity of resources that will always prevail, it seems likely that integrating special education services into a coherent educational plan for all students is a necessary condition for improving education for poor children.

Special education is probably a significant cause of the increase in educational expenditures over the last few decades, says W. Stephen Barnett (1994), who estimates that at least 12 percent of students are served by the special-education system at any one time. Barnett assumes that in many states with high percentages of children in special education, many of the children who receive the services are from low-income families. Massachusetts, for example, serves 20-25 percent of its children in special education. Says Barnett, "It is ludicrous to maintain that 1 in 5 children in Massachusetts has a disability and requires special education. I am not sure that it is sensible to maintain that even 10% of the population is disabled in any educationally meaningful sense."

He believes the same criteria of offering special education as a service to children who need it, instead of what group or location they belong to, should be applied to underachieving students:

> Based on how far behind they are, some children could be designated as needing additional services (such as smaller classes, better teachers, tutoring, more time in school, etc.). Funding formulas that provided extra resources or services for all children who were defined as underachieving relative to a state standard would be available to all communities, and, potentially, to all families regardless of income, (socioeconomic status), and other characteristics.

But Barnett does not provide any evidence that such an approach will

actually lead to improved student achievement; in fact, he says there is no real evidence that special education is more effective than regular education.

Many issues surround special education: how to use special-education funds wisely, how to define special education, whether to use pullout or inclusion programs, and whether to hire teachers trained in handling special-education children are just a few. As with many issues related to resource allocation in public schools today, there seems to be little agreement from researchers and educators about how best to address these issues.

## Teaching Methods and Styles

Many schools are attempting to change teaching methods as an economical way of improving academic achievement. Such methods as tutoring, reinforcement of learning, corrective feedback and explanations, student participation, graded homework, student time on task, reading and study skills, personalized instruction, cooperative learning, and parental intervention and instruction are currently popular (Ornstein, September 1990). Also commanding attention is hands-on learning, which can mean anything from laboratory work in a science class to school-to-work programs.

Although it is not the purpose of this Bulletin to cover all teaching methods, three common classroom approaches that promote student outcomes while dealing with tight resources are mentioned briefly here: block plans, work teams, and cooperative learning.

### Block Plans

The block plan, or Copernican Plan, is a means of addressing school finance problems through innovative scheduling—reducing the number of classes that students take and that teachers teach in a given school day. James M. Carroll (1994) says cutbacks in school financing and teaching staff can be offset by the way the block plan "fundamentally changes the way schools use time. For example, classes are taught in much longer periods (90 minutes, two hours, or four hours per day), and they meet for only part of the school year (30 days, 45 days, 60 days, or 90 days); therefore, students and teachers have fewer classes each day.

"The schedule change," says Carroll, "is a means to create a classroom environment that fosters vastly improved relationships between teachers and students and that provides much more manageable workloads for both teachers and students." One study of seven high schools using block plans found a median increase in students' academic mastery of 18 percent. In addition, there was a median decrease of 36 percent for dropout rates during the first year, four schools showed improved attendance, and the suspension rate decreased.

In 1991, Wasson High School in Colorado Springs, Colorado, switched from a seven-period day to a four-period day block plan, with three ninety-minute teaching periods and a planning period. According to Nancy R. Needham (1993), advantages of this scheduling configuration include:

- The number of students in each class was reduced by 50 percent.
- The schedule is more relaxed for teachers.
- Students have more inclass time for practice and conferences.
- Students are taking more electives and earning more credits.
- The school can now offer more courses since students have room for eight full-year courses instead of seven.
- The longer class periods make it "theoretically possible for teachers to cover a year's worth of material in one semester."

On the other hand, three problems "may or may not be related to the block plan," Needham says. First, fewer As are given. However, grades "generally are unchanged" under the block plan. Second, many teachers say they can't cover as much material in one ninety-minute class as they could in two fifty-five-minute classes. Redesigning courses is recommended. And finally, Needham says that students may lose "continuity between course levels because block scheduling keeps them away from a subject for as much as a summer and a quarter." According to Principal George Houston, though, there is no evidence that such students are any worse off than if they had been away from the subject for the summer only (Needham).

At Calapooia Middle School in Albany, seventh and eighth graders are exposed to a partial block plan: They have one ninety-four-minute class plus five additional classes. The block-class curriculum consists of reading, language arts, and social studies. Reading and language skills are used to teach the course subject: social studies.

Maria Steen, a Spanish teacher at Wasson High School in Colorado Springs, said that when her school shifted to a block plan of four ninety-minute classes a day, she had to relearn how to teach. "Steen chose teaching techniques that involve students working together, that ask students to produce a product, that play to different learning styles, that reinforce previous learning, that are inherently motivating—even fun" (Needham). Other teachers at the school use field trips and compress their presentations to bare essentials.

Block plans are one strategy to overcome time restrictions in the classroom. In many districts, however, as will be discussed in chapter 5, policies prevent experimentation with class length and credit hours.

## Team Teaching

Team teaching is being heralded as a way of sharing new ideas and methods, maintaining student interest, freeing teachers' time for professional development, and preventing teacher burnout. The John F. Kennedy Middle School in Eugene has four teams, each with four hours' daily control of their grade-level students, so they can do a lot of cross-training and teaching. Teams are based on grade levels and core academics or elective academics.

Principal Doug Smith said that teams "give us consistency across the board. Behavior management is more consistent, and teachers have a greater opportunity to connect with core areas." For example, spelling words can be taken from such subjects as science and math. "Teams help us keep each other going," Smith said. In addition, they help with the increased class sizes brought on by Measure 5. In spite of all the cutbacks, Smith said "we're having one of our best years ever academically." He attributes most of this success to team teaching and collaboration.

At Calapooia Middle School in Albany, team teaching helps sixth-grade students make the transition from one teacher at the elementary level to seven teachers at the middle school and high school levels. According to Principal Kathleen Hering, sixth-graders are assigned to two teachers who, as a team, handle all subjects except one elective. The students also leave the classroom for physical education, but the two team teachers go with them and assist the physical-education teacher since it is such a large group. Hering reported that

> the team of two teachers support each other and plan together. The teachers choose a theme and teach around that theme. For example, if the students are studying the Caribbean in social studies, they're likely to be studying marine life during science, reading the novel *The Cay* in literature, building sea creatures in art, and studying proportions in math so that those sea creatures can be built in proportion.
>
> The team of two teachers have sixty students between them, but it's up to them to decide how to divide those students and which subject each teaches.

The teachers are also free to alter the length of time devoted to each subject. Hering said that teaming has worked well at her school. The students have responded well to the team-teaching arrangement—"kids are real adaptive"—and the two teachers have the same planning period each day.

## Cooperative Learning

The assumption of *cooperative learning* is that students in small, carefully structured learning teams who are rewarded based on the progress made by all team members help one another learn, gain in achievement and self-esteem, and have more respect for their classmates (Johns Hopkins Team

Learning Project undated). According to Johns Hopkins researchers, group goals and individual accountability are the important criteria that must be in place for team learning to be successful.

Three reasons cooperative learning helps students achieve are listed by Alexis L. Mitman and Vicki Lambert (1993): First, students working in peer groups have a greater opportunity to "participate actively in the learning process" and therefore increase their time-on-task. Second, students learn by giving feedback to each other, having to explain their reasoning. Finally, "peer interaction is aligned with adolescents' preferences and, thus, facilitates more positive attitudes toward learning."

No matter which instructional strategies are put into practice, one element is essential: keep students interested. As Theodore Sizer says, "Most kids find school boring" (in NECTL *Highlights*). Children will be motivated and therefore engaged, says Sizer, when they are "known and respected" instead of "categorized and processed," and "when they value what their attention is directed toward." Sizer believes students need intensity and persistence in their learning environments, just as adults do, and "learning has to be modeled and oriented to the real word, which few schools value."

## School Restructuring

The term *school restructuring* concerns changes in the ways schools are governed and students are taught. As Peterson - del Mar writes, "In a time of growing challenges, shrinking resources, and expanding interdependence, educators are apt to choose restructuring as a difficult but necessary step." Schools working on restructuring tend to make changes in one or more of four general areas: (1) student experiences, (2) teachers' professional life, (3) school governance, and (4) collaboration between schools and community ("Estimating the Extent of School Restructuring" 1992).

David T. Conley (1993) defines *restructuring* as activities that "change fundamental assumptions, practices, and relationships, both within the organization and the outside world, in ways that lead to improved and varied student learning outcomes for essentially all students."

Features that may be found in a "restructured" school include flexible time scheduling, team teaching, common planning time for department members or teaching teams, staff development programs, semidepartmentalized or self-contained classes, small classes, students from different grade levels in the same classroom, interdisciplinary teachers sharing the same students, a school-within-a-school, cooperative learning, exploratory classes, and special projects as a regular part of the curriculum ("Estimating"). Also, writes Peterson - del Mar, coalitions—the joining of schools with community organizations or businesses—are commonly part of school restructuring.

Many of these features are discussed in other sections of this Bulletin.

Jim Slemp, principal of Roosevelt Middle School in Eugene, Oregon, says that restructuring at his school has improved instruction, especially through the use of block time and replacing the traditional curriculum guides with an indepth emphasis on "connectedness among curriculum" (Center on Restructuring Schools). Roosevelt also emphasizes "Connections with Community," which "looked at teacher as facilitator, new relationships for teachers with the community, and parent involvement in decision making. It also provided our whole service-learning segment which involves community agencies," Slemp is quoted as saying.

### School Restructuring: Proposed Changes in Organizational Structure

Following are some common "shoulds" suggested by proponents of school restructuring. Whether or not these proposals actually lead to improved student academic achievement is still at issue:

1. Parents should choose their children's schools, and schools should compete for funding based on student enrollment.
2. Individual schools should have autonomy from district and state regulations in basic decisions regarding curriculum, hiring, and budget.
3. Teachers and parents should share decision-making authority with administrators in local school governance.
4. Schools should be held accountable for student performance by districts, states, and parents.
5. Tracking and ability grouping should be abolished and replaced by heterogeneous grouping.
6. Schools should operate year-round.
7. Community social services should be coordinated with school programs.
8. There should be national certification of teachers and ladders of professional advancement within the teaching profession.
9. There should be more opportunity for teachers to plan and work together in schools.
10. Students should spend more time in small-group and individual study, less in large-group instruction.
11. Students should advance in school not according to grades attended and credits earned, but according to demonstrated proficiency.

(*Source*: Fred M. Newmann, *Educational Researcher*, March 1993)

## School Culture

School culture is an important factor in school success. According to the NECTL (*Research Findings* 1993), "High achieving countries share one characteristic: a culture of learning. Unless the task of learning is valued, the teaching strategy may be irrelevant." Not only countries but individual schools have cultures that either encourage or impede learning.

Priscilla Wohlstetter, director of the University of Southern California Center on Educational Governance, explained the importance of school culture and success:

> If you look at private schools or magnet schools and ask what makes them good, the answer is that there's a "buy in" among staff, parents, and students to the vision of the school. There is a unique culture of a very strong community feeling that governs the school, which is facilitated by the ability of people at the school site to define their vision for the school and what makes them different from the school down the street. To tailor their programs, they need some budget and curriculum control, as well as some staffing control to be able to hire people who fit in with that vision, with that school personality and community. (Interview, January 26, 1995)

Successful schools encourage students to do well by making them feel they belong. Sharratt (1993) explains that such schools promote a pleasant learning environment; think and act in terms of "our"; model reward and reinforce loyalty; and develop a sense of family within the classroom and school. Fred M. Newmann (1991) says that when schools become communities of learning, there are many benefits: Teachers and students feel like real participants in the school; they relate to each other on a more open basis as whole persons; they care about the school and take more responsibility for its success; and they turn to each other for help in meeting their individual and collective needs.

The theory behind the Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) is that schools are the center of expertise, and that to change the performance of children, the culture and structure of the entire school must be changed. Children, not teachers or administrators, must be placed above all others in importance. ASP enlists community and school-based support for basic concepts, using school-based management to involve *all* employees in "instituting a teaching/learning philosophy that builds on the strengths of the child, not remediating the child's weaknesses" (NECTL *Highlights*).

Many schools are moving to a communal model to counter the "problems of bureaucracy," such as large classes, conflicting goals, and lower track classes, according to Valerie E. Lee and Julia B. Smith (1994):

> In communal organizations, school members (both teachers and students) pursue common activities and get to know each other well. Complicated rules and procedures are less necessary, because the school setting is smaller, contact between people is more sustained and more personal, and there is more agreement on organizational purpose for which people share responsibility....
>
> In short, in a communal school the educational focus for students and teachers seems clearer to those who experience it, and the increased opportunity for sustained contact in groups may heighten the commitment of both teachers and students to succeed. Schools with this form have more meaning for their members.

Many of the innovative instructional and organizational strategies

being tried in schools contribute to a sense of school community: cooperative and small-group learning, team teaching, schools-within-schools, and magnet schools. Do these strategies contribute to improved student performance? Newmann (1991) contends, "It all depends upon how the innovations are used":

> We have seen instances, for example, of schools where committed staff with minimal structural support offer more authentic instruction to students than in other schools where structural support is superior (e.g., common planning time for teachers), but the opportunities are not used.

This chapter has discussed a wide variety of issues related to improving student achievement through instructional strategies, including considering the individuality and self-esteem of students; targeting at-risk and special-needs students; and using block plans, team teaching, or cooperative learning as methods. Other characteristics, such as school culture, also affect student achievement. "Educators' instructional goals, their knowledge of subjects, their patterns of interaction, their commitment to excellence, equity, or the development of children, their receptiveness to innovation" all determine the impact that schools have on students (Newmann 1991).

Schools will continue to experiment with instructional strategies to find out what works best for their unique student populations. What works well in one school may fail in another; only research, time, and experimentation with different approaches will reveal what methods should be used in each school. In the meantime, as the next chapter makes clear, policy-makers must allow schools the freedom to try innovative teaching, organizational, and management strategies.

*Chapter 5*

# Policies Favoring Student Learning

Money alone cannot ensure student achievement. Often what prevents innovative uses of the funds that are available is ill-conceived policies at the state, district, and school levels. Useful policies focus on such issues as curricular goals, assessment of student skills and academic achievement, professional development for teachers, and treatment of at-risk and learning-disabled students. Additional or overly strict policies can stifle rather than support education.

The consensus among educators and researchers is that policy-makers need to lay off, back off, and let go!

Schools must be freed of educational regulations and mandates, such as those related to class size, school time spent on a particular subject, and centralized textbook adoption, says the Committee for Economic Development, for these prevent unique educational programs from being developed. Just as troubling but far more controversial to educators are social mandates that the government imposes on schools. CED recognizes that some mandates are necessary—such as not discriminating on the basis of race, ethnicity, or gender, and basic health and safety regulations. But others are merely a "political temptation" for legislators:

> Even when budgets are tight, politicians can garner political credit by creating new programs, passing laws to protect children from some perceived danger, or requiring instruction in the latest social trend, often without undertaking the unpopular task of paying for the new requirement. If programs fail or become very costly, others can be blamed for poor implementation or mismanagement. As a result, legislative or governing authorities often give little thought to how local school districts will fund a new requirement or how new mandates will reduce the time and resources available for academic study.

> In addition, school boards and central administrators often hide behind these mandates as an excuse to avoid dealing with their own inefficient use of resources. (CED)

To avoid some of these problems, CED recommends that legislators and education governance bodies evaluate all mandates using the following principles:

- Consider their broad educational benefits and their cost in terms of money, personnel, and time.
- Ask whether they unduly limit the flexibility of the schools to meet the learning needs of their students.
- Be suspicious of mandates that are directed at procedures or other educational inputs, rather than achievement.
- Be willing to fund expensive social or safety mandates, or else don't mandate them.
- Ensure that mandates are cost-effective.

Examples of mandates that do not meet these criteria, according to the CED, are Compensatory Education (ESEA Title I, which gives teachers and principals little leeway to "determine if children's needs can be better met in other settings"), Asbestos Abatement, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, credit-hour graduation requirements (which inhibit school flexibility to experiment with school-day reorganization), excessive documentation, and union contracts that put undue restrictions on teachers' time.

Another problem is that policies often contradict each other. Policies come from the federal, state, district, and school levels. As the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (1991) explains:

> Our complex, multilevel governance structure, with a number of separately constituted centers of authority at each level, frustrates purposeful coordination. The policy generation machines at each level and within each level have independent timelines, political interests, multiple and changing special interest groups, and few incentives to spend the time and energy to coordinate their efforts. As a result, polices compete, overlap and often conflict.

The real concern is that students may suffer because of this confusion: "The array of mandates, guidelines, incentives, sanctions and programs" drain schools of their energies to pursue serious school improvement.

This chapter illustrates some ways that policies can be directed toward improved student outcomes at the state, district, and school levels, and, by implication, at the federal level.

## State Level

Most schools either need to change or are changing, and, therefore, state policies must change. If not, policies can actually impede improvements at the district and school levels. The problems with typical state policies are manifold. Hanushek and colleagues find fault with state finance programs that dictate overall resources, for they often "penalize districts for saving money or for organizing schools in nonstandard ways. Worse, they sometimes reduce or remove funds when student outcomes improve." State policies must focus on student outcomes through goal setting instead of management, Hanushek and colleagues advise.

Lays argues that policy reforms of the last decade have focused on the wrong things—increasing teachers' pay, establishing teacher competency testing, making graduation requirements stricter—instead of trying to "change the general way we go about educating." Therefore, students have not substantially improved academically. She concludes that state legislatures need to "set goals and then lay off."

Odden, too, finds that it is difficult for schools to redesign educational services to improve student learning when they are limited by federal, state, local, and union contract rules and regulations: "A serious results-oriented system would de-emphasize regulations and focus accountability on what students actually learned."

The traditional policies forced on schools, such as those specifying staffing, professional development, curriculum, time, resource use, and budgeting practices, cause schools to ignore student outcomes. Also, schools are sometimes so overburdened with curriculum mandates that it may be impossible to teach students everything mandated in the traditional day.

Allan S. Vann (1990), principal of James H. Boyd Elementary School in Huntington, New York, found that "state curriculum mandates were not being properly met in many of our classrooms" because teachers did not have the time. Vann's school had to eliminate certain programs, such as PTA-sponsored cultural-arts activities and other schoolwide activities, to attempt to fit "an expanding elementary curriculum into a school day that is not expanding." With more flexibility, it is assumed, the relationship between resources and performance can be improved, Elmore suggests.

In *Putting Learning First* (1994), the Research and Policy Committee of the CED calls for policy-makers to stop adding "mission upon mission, mandate upon mandate, onto already overburdened schools, diluting and deflecting the schools' ability to fulfill their educational goals." Instead of defining goals in terms of "what goes into education, such as teacher/pupil ratios, per-pupil expenditures, or compliance with regulatory requirements," those who set education policy must define goals in terms of "what is sup-

posed to come out—learning and achievement." The report continues: "CED believes that there can be no significant progress in education reform—and no lasting improvement in educational achievement—until those who govern the system change the way schools are organized and managed."

CED bases its findings on four beliefs: (1) public schools are fundamental to a strong American society, (2) the primary mission of public schools should be learning and achievement, (3) schools are not social-service institutions and should not be asked to solve all our nation's social ills and cultural conflicts, and (4) the current emphasis on compliance with regulations should be reduced. In summary, CED says that the state's role in education must be limited to establishing broad educational goals and ensuring that local authorities, "whether at the community or the school level, have the support services, resources, and oversight to attain those goals."

### State Policies That Support Educational Goals

Allen Odden offers examples of polices that support education goals:

- high-quality curriculum standards such as those developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, coupled with new and revised instructional materials
- new forms of performance assessment, strongly linked to the curriculum standards, that indicate what students know as well as what they can do
- substantially expanded professional development along with dramatically revised preservice teacher training

(*Source*: Allan Odden 1994)

Gene Sharratt points out that many policies are generating controversy in education today. For example, he says, "One that's very controversial is compulsory attendance. Should education be a right or responsibility? Another issue is the role of local decision-making versus the role of the state legislature. The legislature's view is 'If we fund it, then we want tight control of it.' The local district and board also want control. Where is the balance?"

According to Yvonne Katz of the Beaverton School District, what policy-makers need to do is fund programs. "Equity funding is the problem with Measure 5. We're not even receiving the state average. Based on the formulas the state is using, our district is receiving a little over $4,000 per student."

**Accountability and Incentives**

Susan Fuhrman (1994) asserts that state policies must define and develop accountability for results as well as remove constraints on school practice. It must be left to the schools themselves to determine the best strategies for improving student academic performance. Newmann (1991) also believes that it is a valuable policy for states to hold schools accountable

for student achievement. This can be accomplished by doing the following:

- gathering more precise information about student achievement on a periodic basis
- [using] indicators that can be compared across classrooms, schools, and districts over time
- making the information more widely accessible to the public
- allocating more dramatic positive and negative consequences for performance to students, teachers, schools, and districts (Fred M. Newmann 1991)

Also, Fuhrman says, state policy-makers "*can* establish ambitious goals and reinforce them with coordinated policies." Having a clear vision of reform works, she argues, as do policies that encourage public and professional involvement. Fuhrman's conclusion is that "higher-level policy should focus on results rather than school process."

Recently, writers have seemed to agree that incentives must be included in state policies. CPRE (1993) recommends that state policies should be performance oriented to bring about effective spending and improved student achievement. Resources could be provided to schools or teachers through a reward-based system. "Whatever the particulars, experimentation and flexibility must be built into performance-oriented policies since they are new to education and will require time to evaluate and refine."

In summary, then, one way legislatures can "lay off" is by encouraging school-based management, which allows schools to make budget, curriculum, and personnel decisions. Also, legislatures should allow for innovative programs by waiving requirements, provide financial incentives for districts to try new things, provide adequate finances, and allow enough time for program evaluation (Lays). Policy-makers must keep in mind that improved student learning is their main goal. Exciting new trends in school-based

### The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990: A Model for State Policy-Makers

According to Lays, the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990

- sets educational goals
- describes rewards and sanctions for individual schools based on performance
- exempts successful schools from regulations
- requires that students graduate based on a mastery of skills
- mandates school councils made up of parents, teachers, and the principal to take over control of personnel matters, budgeting, and design and implementation of curriculum for their school
- establishes a professional standards board to oversee teacher certification and come up with an alternative route to teacher certification

(*Source*: Julie Lays 1991)

reform are often unable to be enacted at the school level because of strict state policies. Old policies must be eliminated and replaced with new ones that are "directed toward learning outcomes, equity, financing, teacher certification, standards, and assessment" (Diane Wyllie Rigden).

### School Equity Funding

One issue in state policy-making is providing the same amount of money to each school. This is happening in Oregon with the state's equity funding requirement. William H. Clune (December 1994) believes policies must focus on making school expenditures equal across all schools, and the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools says that policies must give attention "to organizational mechanisms that might respond equitably to escalating pluralism" (Fall 1991).

Other authorities, however, see fault with such views. Most obvious is the tremendous cost. Elmore estimates that "in the dozen or so most populous states the cost of remedying this problem alone would be in the billions of dollars per state." Elmore is "highly skeptical that changing policy in the way Clune suggests will result in returns, in the form of student performance, that will justify its high cost."

Achieving adequate school funding will be costly in low-income districts, Clune admits, as well as require major modifications in school-finance philosophy and formulas and a new kind of governance capable of producing more cost-effective education. Murnane calls this "novel, critical, and fraught with uncertainty," while Stanley Pogrow (1994) is reminded of the "litany of 'in' politically correct policy panaceas" that have nothing to do with his own experiences of working with educationally disadvantaged students.

Barnett contends that schools don't need more money to create equity in school finance; instead, the distribution of existing resources needs to be altered: "It is difficult to muster much enthusiasm for devoting large amounts of political and economic resources to achieving purely procedural or financial equity." Instead of throwing money at low-spending districts and hoping their students improve academically, Hanushek argues, we need to redesign the funding system by rewarding those schools that show improvement.

## District Level

At the district level, researchers and educators agree that policy-makers need to be flexible. They must be careful not to limit the principal's authority and accountability, limit the implementation of such governance structures as school-based management, and prevent innovative teaching methods or restructuring of the school day or time. District policies that are

too strict can prevent teachers, parents, and principals from having a voice in curricula, spending, and selection of personnel.

Scott Mutchie, superintendent of the Bend-LaPine School District, says that major changes and improvements in schools cannot be made unless policies are reevaluated. "We're not talking about cosmetic changes; we're talking about major changes such as breaking up the school day, moving away from the seat-hour requirements, using completely different paradigms than what came out of the Industrial Revolution." As an example, Mutchie says that collective-bargaining agreements limit what teachers can and cannot do, particularly when discussing changing the length of the school day and year.

The Committee for Economic Development (CED) recommends that those who govern schools do the following:

- make it clear to the community that learning is the schools' fundamental goal
- ensure that all policies support learning and achievement and are "well-coordinated and coherent"
- set goals for and monitor student achievement, using state and national standards
- make sure that adequate resources are provided to schools to meet such goals
- delegate responsibility and authority, as well as accountability, for making progress toward achievement goals
- provide incentives to teachers, students, and administrators for rewarding achievement
- establish effective methods "for dealing with teachers and administrators who perform poorly"
- maintain communication with parents and community members and include them in the learning process
- "coordinate policies and activities with related government and private institutions that are responsible for child development, health, welfare, and other services," and remove these concerns as the school's responsibility
- "support, gather, and disseminate research and information that help schools develop educational programs to fit their students' needs and give parents a means to evaluate their schools" (CED)

It is time to clean up extraneous agendas, CED advises, and focus on the primary mission of public schools: to provide children with "substantial knowledge and sound academic skills."

A major assumption prevalent today is that holding schools accountable for student achievement will lead to better quality education. Policy-

## Using Time Effectively in the Classroom: What School Boards Can Do

According to the New York State School Boards Association, school boards can help ensure student success by doing the following:

- Review existing district policies that affect the use of instructional, planning, or inservice time.
- Review the district's mission, philosophy, and goals to identify areas where changes in the allocation of time could be beneficial.
- Review the district's graduate requirements to ensure that they reflect district goals and represent adequate learning for further study and employment.
- Solicit input about scheduling from administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other members of the community.
- Provide for public discourse on proposed changes, for example, through the establishment of an advisory committee representing administrators, teachers, students, and the community.
- Investigate potential sources of funding for extended-day programs such as state supported programs, local foundations, or corporate support.

(*Source*: New York State School Boards Association 1991)

makers should keep in mind, however, that the standards for accountability must be clear and fair, and accountability must be coupled with decision-making authority and incentives at the school site.

## School Boards: Setting Policy

"Local school boards should abandon their penchant for micromanagement and concentrate on education policy," states the CED. The CED report advises school boards to do the following:

- establish overall objectives for curriculum but not be involved in curriculum development
- establish policies for contracting and purchasing and hire independent auditors to review the execution of these policies but not actually supervise these arrangements
- establish staff development policies to improve teaching in the district
- work alongside general-purpose government to ensure that educational policies are coordinated with a variety of children's services (CED)

School boards must avoid looking out for special-interest groups at the "expense of the majority of students," says the CED; instead, they must focus on student learning and achievement. Through school-based management, decision-making authority must be given to those who work closest with students—individual schools.

Clune ("The Case") advises school boards and other governing bodies to release schools from many existing restrictions, "allowing them to make

the multiple adjustments necessary for optimal performance. For example, schools may need broad authority to create different kinds of staff positions and new methods of evaluating teacher performance."

Some Oregon educators warn of areas where school board policies can be a problem. Bend-LaPine Superintendent Mutchie says, "The school board has for years set policy and made decisions on behalf of the public, but today there are site teams and councils, so another set of policies is needed that covers the authority of those people to make decisions." Mutchie believes it is important to review "your policies and be careful to avoid making too-radical changes. It's a real fragile environment when power is shifting; you have to move slowly enough so that you can go back and fix what you need to."

Accountability is a key issue in redistributing authority and setting policies. Currently, the state of Oregon is ultimately responsible for school success because of statutes; therefore, they are having to revise these statutes. School boards will have to do the same.

## School Level

Hanushek and colleagues express the policy challenge at the school level as follows: "How to overcome public discontent with the performance of schools at the same time that school responsibilities, costs, and competition for resources are increasing." These conflicts are so substantial that no one "should believe there are quick or easy answers to the problems of schools."

As a general rule, schools need to develop policies that focus resources on improving student achievement. As Clune (December 1994b) makes clear, policies must focus on student outcomes rather than inputs. Dollars must be spent on improving student achievement, and policies must set this into practice. Karen Prager (1993) advises principals to establish goals that focus on student outcomes, beginning with a school mission statement and curricular content goals.

Policies at the school site must be clear to students and teachers. As Weber says, "In schools where policies regarding absences and tardiness were clear, well communicated, collaboratively made, and consistently enforced, students were more likely to learn and stay on task. Furthermore, teacher morale was higher." Goals must not only be clear, but specific, for academic improvement to take place. "Too often learning goals are delineated in committee through further abstract language," says Prager, "while the onus to put the plans into place is left to individual staff."

Instead, the school can encourage staff development so that teachers can focus on new teaching practices. Principals setting curricular goals must

## The Relationship Between the Principal's Leadership Style and Student Achievement

At the school site, the principal's leadership style and policy-setting can affect student outcomes. Norbert A. Stirzaker and Fred L. Splittgerber (1991) recommend that principals demonstrate the following attributes:

1. Consistency of performance in his/her role and responsibilities.
2. Integrity in handing personnel and instructional problems.
3. A willingness to take risks in the interest of encouraging faculty experimentation.
4. An attitude that expects good things to happen from continued experimentation while recognizing that every experiment may not be successful.
5. Respect by giving professional support to teachers, staff, and students.
6. Encouragement for parents to become partners with their children in the learning process.
7. A willingness to provide channels of communication with the school community through which open dialogue may occur.

(*Source*: Stirzaker and Splittgerber 1991)

be careful to avoid three common problems: goals that are too broad, too many diverse goals, and "overly ambitious goals that cannot be implemented with limited resources for staff development and materials" (Newmann in Prager). The importance of clarifying curricular goals is illustrated by Calapooia Middle School in Albany, Oregon. Principal Kathleen Hering says that with all the demands of integrated instruction, "We find that teachers are looking really carefully at the material they're covering. They are checking constantly to verify that they are covering everything necessary to meet the curriculum goals."

Policies should also be related to the issues concerning time (discussed in chapter 2). And educators need to distinguish between the school day and the instructional day when setting policy, advises Ted Sanders:

> We do not make any conscious policy effort to distinguish between the fundamental instructional activities of the school in core curriculum areas and other things that take place during the school day, such as extracurricular activities, counseling and time out for lunch and study hall. The academic mission of the instructional day is often lost in other activities.
>
> Moreover, we rarely view what children do outside the school day as central to the mission of the schools. There is now overwhelming evidence . . . of direct benefit from supportive post-instructional day activity. (NECTL *Highlights*)

The NEA's Robert Barkley, Jr., said that successful schools have made a commitment to change the way they do business. Although each has chosen a somewhat different way to do it, there are some common threads:

> We do not have a prescription or a preferred approach that schools should take. There are certain principles, of course. One is that they

> have to have a very clear focus and purpose for improving student learning, and they have to define what they mean by student learning. They need to reach a consensus on what students need to know.

It is true, said Barkley, that there are as many different opinions on what students need to know as there are teachers and parents. But "what we've discovered is that those schools that are effective are those that have reached a consensus in their school community":

> In the absence of that purpose, all the other things are a waste of time. Schools also need to clarify what they expect to accomplish. The purpose can be as narrow as "we're going to focus on language skills" or "our students are going to learn to read and write, and here's how we're going to go about that and here's how we're going to measure whether we're making progress."

Barkley said it is important for schools to select a specific approach or topic and then decide on what the indicators will be. Everyone in the school must know what those indicators are and devote their resources to them, even at the expense of other things mandated by governments.

An example given by Barkley of a school that has achieved excellent results by clarifying its focus is Rollings Elementary School in St. Petersburg, Florida. The school district adopted the quality management principles of W. Edwards Deming and established a culture in their school that modeled those principles. In the context of this theoretical environment, the school developed a clear, focused purpose: to improve students' writing and reading abilities. "What this leads to is a faculty and a community that knows what it believes about how learning best takes place," Barkley said.

The students participate in setting quality standards and discuss the meaning of quality. "We're talking about second, third, and fourth graders doing this. This focus is the kind of thing that causes schools to be most effective. Unfortunately, the characteristics we're talking about do not exist in many schools." Still, Barkley sees hope for the future, since schools seem to be moving toward such an approach: "Almost every school district is moving toward this in spite of scarce resources because of the pressure to have greater results and be accountable for results."

Principal George Dyer of South Salem High School also suggested rethinking the role of educators:

> We need to think of educators as akin to doctors. The purpose of the educator is to diagnose problems and give ideas for solutions, instead of actually doing what we consider to be education. The teacher becomes more of a coach or a doctor than one who performs all the teaching action. We need to relax teacher certification so that "paraeducators" can take over some of the teachers' tasks.

Policies concerning liability issues, as well as political and labor-relations

issues, need to be relaxed, said Dyer, so that more parents and community members can be mentors: "Education can go beyond the campus, so that the whole community can be involved." In addition to inviting parents and community memebers to come on campus as mentors, policies should allow students to be sent out into the community to learn, and, by using technology, increase the time students spend learning at home.

Jim Slemp, principal of Roosevelt Middle School in Eugene, Oregon, advises policy-makers to let go of the "'You've-got-to-do-it-this-way' sort of thing. We are at a point where we need to break out of those old structures" (Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools 1993). It is important for educators to be able to take risks, even to make mistakes, Slemp believes. Policies must allow the freedom to take such risks, and principals at the school site must "provide an atmosphere where it is okay to be a risk-taker.... You have to set up an atmosphere where messing up, having things not as good for a while is fine, to be expected, supported, and celebrated."

Herbert M. Kliebard and Calvin R. Stone (1992) suggest that excellent schools have a community mandate "to strive for and achieve academic excellence." This mandate is reflected in what types of courses are offered, the way students and teachers use time, the way academic problems are presented, and the presence of a "network of support systems" that prevents most students from failing.

In summary, a litany of mandates and policies from the federal, state, and district governing systems can do nothing to help students achieve academically unless student academic achievement is paramount at the school level. Any policy that prevents the school from making student success its highest priority must be eliminated.

# Conclusion

The Committee for Economic Development concludes that most successful schools do the following: focus on learning, have high expectations for academic achievement, reward effort and results, transmit positive values, involve parents, and give faculty the authority to make key educational decisions.

*Time* magazine's list of the features of charter schools is remarkably similar to the recommendations given by the authors and educators cited in this Bulletin:

> First, reduce class size. Make sure parents are heavily involved. (Contracts with parents are a common feature.) Just as important, keep school size small, particularly in the inner city, where kids desperately need a sense of family and personal commitment from adults. Encourage active hands-on learning, in part through the intelligent use of technology. For older kids, drop the traditional switching of gears and classrooms from math to social studies to biology every 45 minutes and substitute lengthier classes that teach across disciplines.

Despite all the naysayers who complain about the expense and failure of today's schools, the outlook is positive. Chester Finn, director of the Education Excellence Network at Vanderbilt University, says, "If the states make the policy decisions and provide the resources, and if the individual school building and parents make the important decisions about the means, I think we might have a system that works reasonably well" (in Lays). Districts and schools are finding innovative ways to deal with the challenges of restricted budgets and expanding student populations and needs.

From examining the literature and talking with principals and superintendents, one comes away with the sense that educators care deeply about students' academic success. The number one priority for those involved in education continues to be the children themselves.

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